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**Title:** On A Fatalist

**Author(s):** Kaneko, Yukihiko

**Citation:** Hitotsubashi journal of arts and sciences, 5(1): 12-21

**Issue Date:** 1965-01

**Type:** Departmental Bulletin Paper

**URL:** [http://doi.org/10.15057/4517](http://doi.org/10.15057/4517)
ON A FATALIST

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Generally little attention has yet been paid to A Fatalist, or the last chapter of Lermontov's novel A Hero of Our Time (1840). Very few of the books outlining the history of Russian literature that have been published in the Soviet Union deal with that particular chapter. This seems to be due in some measure to the influence which Belinski's essay, On A Hero of Our Time (1840) has had upon Lermontov scholars and, for that matter, literary historians specializing in the nineteenth-century Russian literature. Belinski is universally known to have regarded that last chapter as a mere superaddition. He declares: "You find in A Fatalist nothing new that supplements the characterization of the "Hero of Our Time." As one may see from this, Belinski's view of the chapter in question stems from his evaluation of the basic thought that runs through the novel. One is reminded here that Belinski, while admitting that there is some unity of feeling in the novel, denied the existence therein of any unity of thought whatsoever. Belinski in his On A Hero of Our Time reached the conclusion that it was not so much Pechorin himself as the world surrounding him that was chiefly responsible for his distorted character as well as aimless actions. But that was as far as he would go; he would go in for no further development of the thought of the novel.

It must be admitted, however, that this basic character of Belinski's essay had to be what it was; objectively, it was determined by the social conditions—and their attendant problems—of Russia in those days. Belinski thought it necessary to defend Lermontov's novel, particularly its hero Pechorin, from the bitter attacks by the conservative critics of his time. In his defence of Pechorin, Belinski focussed attention on the hero's excellent potential qualities, and declared that it was the fault of the community that those qualities failed to develop in the right direction. His aim was to awaken the readers to the necessity of criticizing the existing social order based upon serfdom.

For all that, Belinski in his evaluation of Pechorin seems to have paid undue regard to the individuality of Lermontov as the author of the novel. It is true that Belinski pointed out the fact that Lermontov is less objective than is desired in his description of Pechorin, and deplored the lack in this author of detachment necessary for a successful novelist. But this same critic is found falling, more often than not, into the error of identifying Pechorin with Lermontov. At one time, he defends Pechorin so that he may defend Lermontov; at another, he attacks Lermontov through his criticisms of the character of Pechorin. Thus he writes, for instance: "Although the author tries to show himself as a man entirely different from Pechorin with whom he has nothing in common, he has a strong sympathy with Pechorin. There are remarkable similarities in their view of things." Again,
in a letter to Botkin, he goes as far as to say: “Pechorin—the man is Lermontov himself.” Eikhenbaum thinks that this opinion of Belinski’s is the result of the talk that took place between Belinski and Lermontov in 1840, when the former called on the latter at the Ordonans Gaus where he was detained. He thinks that Belinski in these words argued the necessity for Lermontov himself of “emerging from the stage of reflections into that of rationalized self-awareness.”

It was not Belinski alone that showed a tendency to identify Pechorin with Lermontov, the same being seen in varying degrees in all the contemporary readers of A Hero of Our Time. Lermontov himself was very much displeased at this general tendency to identify a literary hero with the author who had created him. In his preface to the second edition of the novel (1841), Lermontov insists upon the universality of the image of Pechorin: “Dear Readers, A Hero of Our Time is really a portrait—not the portrait of any one person, but of the whole of our generation, enlarged with all its faults and weaknesses. You will again tell me that a man can never be as bad as all this. My answer, however, is: so long as you believe in all the tragic, romanticist devils, why not believe in the actual existence of a man like Pechorin?”

In any critical evaluation of a literary hero, one should take the individuality of the author into consideration. But the criterion for the evaluation should not be the similarities between the hero and the author, but the degree of universality the hero can claim as a literary creation. Belinski was of course well aware of this principle of criticism; he did not aim at mere comparison of Pechorin with Lermontov. What he did, being aware of the close resemblance between Pechorin and Lermontov, was to point out on the one hand the lack of enough objectification in the description of Pechorin, and to stress on the other this literary hero’s great potential qualities, thereby ascribing his unhappiness to social causes.

Lermontov himself in the aforementioned preface says: “It would be enough to have the diseases pointed out. How to cure them—this is a thing which nobody but God knows.” It must have been clear to the reading public at that time that the “cure of the diseases” meant removal of the evils produced by the existing social and political systems. But censorship being what it was then, Lermontov could only hint at it in the preface as well as in the body of the novel. The same circumstances forced Belinski to say nothing more than: “In judging men, we should consider the ways and manners of development of their characters as well as the circumstances of their lives which Fate has decreed for them.”

This, however, does not comprise all the basic thought of Lermontov’s A Hero of Our Time. In A Fatalist, or the last chapter of the novel, Lermontov writes about the need for an individual to make a positive effort to emerge from his dependence upon objective conditions. And it is in this chapter that the novel’s unity of thought is brought to completion. The way toward this sort of interpretation is shown by Mikhailova in her scholarly work The Prose of Lermontov (1957). In the aforesaid preface to the second edition of the novel, which appeared after the publication of Belinski’s On A Hero of Our Time, Lermontov says: “Our people in general are still so very young and simple that they are not able to see the moral
Ejkhenbaum, thinking that it was Lermontov's intention to suggest in these words a second meaning of the novel, writes: "This second meaning implicit in the title and throughout the text of the novel, one should take, is its social, historical theme, or the tragedy of the Russian aristocratic intelligentsia in the times after the Decembrist incident."

That Lermontov not only created the image of Pechorin as living among the general reflections of the Decembrist thought but also made some suggestive descriptions of the particular effects of this thought in Pechorin himself, has been pointed out by a series of scholars in the Soviet Union from Apollon Grigoriev down to Ejkhenbaum. If the first meaning of the novel consists, as Lermontov himself affirms, in the pointing out of the diseases of the times, one might include in it what Ejkhenbaum refers to as its second meaning. They are nothing but two different expressions of one and the same subject. When Lermontov spoke of the "diseases" of the times, he must have understood them as one of the elements of "the tragedy of the Russian aristocratic intelligentsia in the times after the Decembrist incident." Therefore, while we agree with Ejkhenbaum in admitting the existence of what he calls the second meaning of the novel, we take it that the core of that meaning is the thought of the need for an individual to fight energetically with his surroundings which is expounded in the novel. And this, we understand, leads on to the thought of the need of political as well as social struggles.

Belinski, however, was not content with his own conclusion. In the closing part of On A Hero of Our Time, he writes: "He (Pechorin) goes out of our sight as a man just as imperfect and inscrutable as he was at his first appearance before us. On this account, although the novel strikes us with its remarkable unity of feeling, it has no unity of thought; and it leaves us with no perspective—meaning that perspective which is involuntarily created in the reader's imagination after he has read through a work of art, to which the reader's fascinated eyes are involuntarily attracted. In this novel is a remarkable originality of creation; but it is not of the high artistic order, or the originality invested in creation through the unity of poetic thought. Instead, it is the originality that is born of the unity of poetic feeling that so strongly moves the reader's mind. There is something inscrutable in this work—something which, like in Goethe's Werther, is not fully explained and, on that account, there is something in the general impression of the novel that oppresses the reader. But this defect, we must say, is at once the merit of Mr. Lermontov's novel. All the social problems of our time depicted in poetic fiction are like this. They are the groans of pain, but groans that relieves the pain."

These words suggest, it must be admitted, the proper angle from which the problem should be approached for its solution, or the way through which it could be adequately solved. It must be borne in mind at the same time that Belinski, in thinking of A Fatalist as a mere superaddition, failed to see the real meaning of that chapter, and that consequently he had to deny the novel that unity of thought which was to be (and, in our opinion, is) completed in that very chapter. And, because he thought that the image of Pechorin failed to give him that perspective which ought to present itself to a reader's imagination who has read through a literary work, he did not say a word about it. Belinski felt from the novel itself that Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time had a task of its own, quite different from that of Gogol's

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8 Б. М. Эйхенбаум, Статьи о Лермонтове, А. Н., 1961, стр. 283.
9 В. Г. Белинский, Сочинения в одном томе, М., 1950, стр. 149.
The Dead Souls.

Whereas the task aimed at and executed in The Dead Souls may be defined as one of artistic cognition of typical, and therefore negative, qualities of serfdom society, the task of A Hero of Our Time may be described as one of artistic cognition of the thought and life of an individual in conflict with the realities of that society, or of a man as a subjective factor of history. Belinski thought that the portrayal of Pechorin was much too "imperfect and inscrutable" for the novel to meet this task, and that there was in it something not fully explained. He therefore avoided deriving from the image of Pechorin any final conclusion, all he said being: "This defect at once is the merit of Mr. Lermontov's novel. All the social problems of our time depicted in poetic fiction are like this." It is exactly for that same reason that this critic at the end of his On A Hero of Our Time expects Lermontov to show the public an "entirely new image of Pechorin" in some other work.10 Thus it might seem that Belinski himself tried seriously to interpret the artistic task of A Hero of Our Time within the confines of that of The Dead Souls. But, objectively, his remarks above quoted, and for that matter, the whole contents of his essay, tell us more than that.

All these things point to the importance of a proper understanding of A Fatalist for the understanding and appreciation of the whole novel, especially of the image of Pechorin. Dependence of the individual upon social conditions is the principal, clear-cut concern of the four chapters which precede A Fatalist, especially the chapter The Princess, where the criticism of the faults of Pechorin leads to that of the then existing system of social relations. It is shown there that the hero, though depraved, has many excellent potentialities, and that those potentialities, under different social circumstances, might well develop in altogether different directions. But the freedom of a person's individuality involves struggling with the conditions that put restraint upon it. A Fatalist raises the problem of whether a man should give in to his fate, or should struggle against it, i.e. the problem of the individual's responsibility for struggle against his own fate.

As far as we know, the first critic to draw attention to the crucial meaning of A Fatalist was Vinogradov. In his essay, The Prose Style of Lermontov, he says: "Were it not for the chapter A Fatalist, Pechorin's portrait would have been imperfect, and the irony of this "Hero of Our Time" doomed to self-destruction would not have attained the tragic quality that it has."11 Without trying to develop this assumption any further, however, Vinogradov proceeds to analyse the characteristics of the prose style of A Fatalist. Further, what he sees in that chapter, as the above quotation may show, is the confirmation of the tragic irony of Pechorin as a man doomed to self-destruction, and therefore the confirmation of what Belinski understands as the real meaning of the image of Pechorin.

Asmus, on the other hand, in his essay The Scope of Lermontov's Thought (1941), takes Lermontov to be a fatalist, and regards A Fatalist as the work which best embodies his fatalism, or his view of predestination. Lermontov's fatalism, as Asmus puts it, is not fatalism "of obedience, irresponsibility and non resistance" but "of challenge, resistance and continual negation."12 He tells us nothing, however, about the bearing which A Fatalist has upon the whole novel.

The late Mikhajlova in The Prose of Lermontov could derive from A Fatalist one positive

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10 Tam же, стр. 150.
11 B. Виноградов. Стиль прозы Лермонтова. Литературное наследство, No. 43—44, 1941, стр. 618.
12 B. Асмус. Круг идей Лермонтова, Литературное наследство, No. 43—44, 1941, стр. 104.
conclusion. "What Lermontov tried to say by this work," says Mikhajlova "may be that, so long as there is room left both for accidents and for subjective 'misconception' in the explanation of accidental happenings, no one can determine finally and definitely whether or not fate exists. But if fate exists (Vulich's fate is an instance that leads one to that belief)—even in that case, what is left for a man to do is... to act, to try his own fate." Then she concludes: "If there is predestination, one can dare act as recklessly and take such chance as Vulich did. If there is no predestination, or its existence is doubtful, it becomes the more necessary to act like Pechorin who tested his fate." As we shall see later, we do not entirely agree with this view. Nevertheless, we may say that the same view suggests the right approach to the proper understanding of the meaning not only of A Fatalist but of the whole novel.

The following points are worth notice. When Mikhajlova says, "In the hero of this novel, Lermontov tried to show not only the helplessness of an individual whose personality is conditioned by social circumstances today, but also the opposite tendency showing the possibility of overcoming them," she will be justified, to be sure, if she is using the phrase "opposite tendency" in a sense that suggests either the objective possibility or even the necessity of making such positive efforts. But if she is using it in a sense that implies a certain inclination or capability in Pechorin, then it must be said that by it she is blocking the correct understanding of the meaning of A Fatalist and of the unity of thought of the novel as a whole. Why so? Because Pechorin, as a matter of fact, could not overcome his own fate even after the event that is described in A Fatalist, nor did he make any serious effort for that purpose. Therefore, what is shown in A Fatalist is not so much Pechorin's capability or efforts he made to overcome his fate, as the problem of the need for an individual to fight passionately against his fate, or as an individual's responsibility for his actions as a part of this problem, or as the proper approach toward the solution of those problems.

The conclusion reached by Mikhajlova has not received the support of the subsequent scholars, of whom Ejkhenbaum and Tamarchenko are the only ones that have talked at all of the meaning of A Fatalist since the publication of her work. To the discussion of A Fatalist, Ejkhenbaum devotes only two pages out of the sixty-four consisting On A Hero of Our Time which first appeared in his Essays on Lermontov (1961). Then, the major part of that discussion consists of illustrations of the fact that fatalism was the most popular literary subject in the 1820's, and no mention is made of the bearing A Fatalist has upon the whole novel. Here too may be perceived some influence of Belinski's criticism of A Hero of Our Time, of his criticism of A Fatalist in particular. Quoting the passage beginning with Pechorin's words "I like to have doubts about everything," Ejkhenbaum writes: "Here is a transition of fatalism into what is opposite to it. That is to say, to an idea that if fate exists (even in the form of consistency with the law of historical necessity) the sense of its existence is sure to make a man more aggressive, more daring. This is no solution of the problem of fatalism. But herein is shown another aspect of such view of life and the world—that aspect which leads a man not to a reconciliation with realities, but to developing a resolute character, and to action." This evidently is not a criticism of Mikhajlova's

15 Там же, стр. 336.
16 Б. М. Эйхенбаум, Статьи о Лермонтове. А. Н., 1961, стр. 282.
view even, but a return to that view of Asmus's to which we have already referred.

Tamarchenko, on the other hand, in *Untrammelled Novels of Lermontov* (1961),[17] attaches great importance to the meaning of Pechorin's meditations with fatalism as their motif, but he is not very much concerned with fatalism itself.

The main subject of *A Fatalist* is the problem of fate. It is presented there in the form of the question as to whether predestination exists or not. The inner necessity of Pechorin's taking up this problem in his diary is fully anticipated in the chapter that precedes it. Here are some passages which show Pechorin meditating upon fate:

— Why had fate thrown me among this peaceful band of honest smugglers? [80]
— It is evident that fate has taken in hand the matter of my not being bored. [80]
— Was it fate that has brought her once more to the Caucasus? [81]
— It's been my fate ever since I was a child. [80]
— During my whole active life fate has seemed always to make me share the denouement of other people's dramas. [81]
— What can be Fate's object in this? I hope she hasn't designated me author of middle class tragedies and family romances? [80]
— When I was a child I remember that an old woman told my mother my future, and she said I should meet my death at the hands of an angry woman. This made a deep impression on me at the time, and there was born in me later an insuperable aversion from marriage. Something tells me that the prophecy will come true, but at least I can make every effort to postpone the event as long as possible. [90]
— For the second time fortune allowed me to overhear a conversation that was to decide his fate. [98]
— How many times in my life have I played the part of an axe in the hands of Fate! [98]
— I may get better, or I may die; it will be as Fate decides it. [97]
— I wanted to give myself full right to have no mercy on him provided fate spared me. [97]
— Why I was unwilling to tread the path that Fate had opened up? [109]

These passages show that, though Pechorin rebels against the aristocracy, he is always passive in his attitude toward fate. That is his way of meeting realities. True, he plunges himself into realities with sheer eagerness, but the more he feels the futility of his own action, the more acutely he feels the existence of some invisible power which governs realities. He despises all men, even "the wisest and best-natured of men" such as Verner; but he can in no way regard himself as the victor, nor can he convince himself of his absolute superiority over others. And he believes that it is his fate, too, not to have followed the path opened up for him by fate.

"The man does not exist" says Pechorin, "whose past has such power over him as mine has over me. The memory of each past joy or sorrow thrusts painfully at my heart and draws ever the same note from it. I am stupidly made; I forgot nothing—nothing!" [63] Thus, Pechorin has no principles of action, no position to assume towards realities. As a result, he is inclined to believe that even his own will is determined by fate.

A man who is easily influenced by the past is also liable to the influences of environment. Pechorin's confessions to Mary illustrate this, too, most plainly. He speaks of his character

[17] Д.Е. Тамарченко, Свободный роман Лермонтова, его сб. Из истории русского классического романа, А.
as having been distorted by environment throughout its formative periods. In other words, he ascribes everything to environment. He has no memory of any efforts he made or struggles he had for the establishment of his subjectivity. In order to make sure for ourselves of Pechorin's passive attitude toward environment, let us quote part of his confessions to Mary:

"It's been my fate ever since I was a child. Everyone read in my face the sign of bad qualities which were not there at the time, though they came into being by suggestion. I was shy and was accused of craftiness; so I became secretive. I had a deep sense of good and evil, but nobody showed me kindness or treated me decently; so I became bitter and spiteful. I was sulky when other children were cheerful and talkative. I felt superior to them, but I was thrust below them; and so I became jealous. I was ready to love the whole world, but no one understood me; and I learned to hate. My joyless youth was spent in struggling with myself and the world. I feared derision and hid my finer feelings in the depth of my heart. And there they died. I spoke the truth, but nobody believed me; so I began to tell lies. I knew well the world and the springs of human action, and became skilled in the science of life. But I saw that others were happy without this skill, profiting (though they had not paid as I had) by the advantages I struggled so tirelessly to obtain. And then despair was born in me, not of the kind that can be cured only by a bullet, but a cold, feeble despair, which hides itself under kindliness and an amiable smile. My nature became crippled; half of me ceased to exist, dried up, evaporated, died—and I cut it out and threw it away so that no one knew of the existence of this side of me."  

The fact that Pechorin spent his youth at war with himself and fashionable society would mean his revolt against the aristocratic circles. However, this did not result in creating new values; it just ended in his burying his best sentiments in the depths of his heart, for fear that he might become an object of derision. Here again, he is seen to have given up midway his efforts to establish a subjective position for himself. Otherwise he only acted passively, undergoing the negative influences of environment.

Thus, Pechorin has the circumstances of his life, or the stern realities, to face, which are ever present in his mind as fate. He must have felt himself perpetually affected by fate, and for that very reason, must have wished to grow out of his passive position toward fate. Thus, fate becomes his greatest concern, becomes the problem of the utmost importance, the solution of which he needs so badly even for the sake of knowing the meaning of his own action.

A Fatalist depicts three incidents which have close interrelations. One evening, there arises a dispute among officers as to whether predestination exists or not, and an officer by the name of Vulich proposes to make a bet staking his own life. He survives the bet, but late that evening he is killed, quite unexpectedly, by a drunken Cossack. Pechorin at great risks to himself arrests this Cossack.

In this first incident, Vulich's aim in offering to bet is simply to decide whether predestination exists or not. He himself does not believe in predestination. Hearing the contending voices of the officers, he finds himself suddenly driven by a desire to try his fate. Until the discussion reaches its white-heat point, he is utterly silent. Pechorin says of Vulich that he was "a brave man, spoke seldom but to the point," while as to Vulich's passion for gambling, he says: "When he was sitting at a green table he became oblivious to everything. As a rule he lost, but continuous ill-luck only spurred him on to further play." What has prompted Vulich to offer to bet with Pechorin, therefore, is nothing but his passion
for gambling; such indeed is his passion for gambling that he goes as far as to bet on his own life to tempt his fate. The reason why Pechorin tells so persistently of Vulich’s extraordinary passion for gambling is that he wishes to suggest thereby that Vulich’s offer to bet comes by no means from his belief in predestination. “Gentlemen,” cries Vulich, “I see no point in these useless arguments. You want proofs; I am prepared to make an experiment on myself which will definitely prove whether a man is able to dispose of his life at his own will…”

When all have shaken their heads, Pechorin proposes the bet. “What will you bet?” Vulich asks. “That there is no predestination,” answers Pechorin. Thus, at this moment Vulich is neither for nor against believing in predestination; he is just prepared to take a stand opposite to whatever position Pechorin may take. The way Vulich proposes of settling the bet also tells this: he proposes to take off one of the pistols hanging upon the wall, put it up to his forehead and, pull the grigger, and that is all. If he should survive, despite this fatal challenge to presumably certain death, then it means that he is not predestined to die at that moment, and he has won the bet. But if he should die, he is the winner of the bet all the same, and Pechorin the loser, for in that case it is to be thought that that fatal moment has been predestined for him, though he dies through winning the bet.

Now the only possibility Vulich could rely upon is either that of the pistol being unloaded, or of the powder being damp. The officers differ with one another as to whether the pistol is loaded or not. One says, “Yes, it must be loaded as it was hanging up; but this is a poor joke.” Another shouts, “I’ll lay you fifty roubles to five that it’s not loaded.” “This new bet was accepted,” writes Pechorin.

Pechorin, who has betted that there is no predestination, reads the seal of death on the face of Vulich. “I have noticed,” says Pechorin, “and many old soldiers will corroborate this—that on the face of a man who is doomed to die within a few hours there is often to be seen a sign of his inevitable fate. Indeed, it is hard for practised eyes to make a mistake.” This remark of Pechorin’s shows that he has always believed in the seal of death. Pechorin says to Vulich, “You will die today.” “Perhaps I shall—and perhaps I shall not…,” Vulich replies slowly and quietly.

Vulich pulls the trigger. The pistol, however, misses fire. All cry in relief: “Thank God, it wasn’t loaded.” “We’ll see about that,” says Vulich. He recocks the pistol and takes aim at a cap hanging on the wall. A shot rings out. When smoke has cleared away, they find that the bullet has run through the middle of the cap and is embedded deep in the wall.

“Are you beginning to believe in predestination?” Vulich asks. “Yes; but I must say I don’t understand why I thought that you were doomed to die today,” replies Pechorin. “Thereupon the man, who had so calmly pointed the pistol at his forehead a moment ago, suddenly flushed and looked embarrassed.” To Pechorin’s thinking, believing in predestination and reading the seal of death in human faces were two different things, there seems to be no question about it; and it is perhaps because Vulich himself believed in the possibility of signs of death that he suddenly changed colour and looked embarrassed to hear those words of Pechorin’s.

We have so far examined the contents of this first incident so minutely, because, as we see, the crucial meaning of the bet settled by Vulich has totally been ignored up to this day in the studies on A Hero of Our Time, the majority of critics and scholars regarding the novel as an embodiment or confirmation of the belief that predestination exists, taking Vulich
to be as much of a fatalist as the title of the chapter suggests, in which last thing Mikhajlova
is no exception. However, we maintain that the objective meaning of the novel consists in
the negation of predestination, though we do admit whether predestination exists or not is a
problem which remains unsolved in the mind of Pechorin.

The second incident takes place wherein Vulich is murdered by a drunken Cossack in a
situation where death is least expected. As he breathes his last, Vulich says “He (i.e.
Pechorin) was right!” Thus, Vulich in the hour of death realizes that Pechorin’s presenti-
ment has proved true. In the third incident Pechorin sets upon himself the task of arresting
this drunken Cossack, the murderer of Vulich, in order to test his own fate. There was a
great possibility of his losing his life, but he was fortunate enough to go through it without
any injuries. “After all this,” says Pechorin, “how can I help being a fatalist? And yet,
how can a man tell whether he is sincerely convinced or not? We so often mistake for
genuine conviction that imposture of our emotions or the blundering of our judgment.”

Here is Pechorin neither affirming nor denying the existence of predestination. He goes on
to say: “I like to have doubts about everything, a propensity which does not preclude de-
termination. On the contrary, so far as I am concerned, I can always go forward more
resolutely when I know what to expect. After all, nothing can happen worse than death,
and death cannot be avoided.” It is obvious that when Pechorin says, “I like to have
doubts about everything,” he is having the existence of predestination in mind. And indeed,
he could act more resolutely when he knew nothing about his predestined fate.

Just so with Vulich, too, who challenged his fate by betting on his own life. When
Pechorin said to him, “You will die today,” he replied slowly and quietly, “Perhaps I shall
—and perhaps I shall not....” Then he went for the pistol. When everything was over, the
consequences of the bet pleased him, and caused him to believe in predestination. But when
he had been told by Pechorin that there was the seal of death on his face, he had suddenly
lost his self-possession. This means that Vulich, like Pechorin, could act more resolutely
when he had no idea what would happen to him.

Mikhajlova directs no attention to this fact, and therefore, quite naturally, she concludes:
“If there is predestination, one can dare act as recklessly and take such chance as Vulich
did. If there is no destination, it becomes the more necessary to act like Pechorin who tested
his fate.” This obviously is not a conclusion to be derived from an accurate analysis of A
Fatalist. We have to stress here over and again that it was in consequence of the bet that
Vulich came to believe in predestination; that it was not because he believed in predestina-
tion in the first place that he could take so bold a step, or as Mikhajlova puts it, could “act
so recklessly and take such a chance.” Otherwise, he could not have lost his self-possession
when he was told by Pechorin that he was doomed to die within a few hours.

Generally speaking, a man will lose his passion for action once he gets to know his in-
evitable fate, whatever that fate may be. It will be possible, however, for such a man to
make positive efforts or to take bold steps toward some definite goal in life, if he is fully
conscious, as Pechorin certainly was, that “nothing can happen worse than death, and death
cannot be avoided.” This is a thought transcending predestination, and the conclusion to be
derived from this thought in Pechorin is that a man should not commit himself to fatalistic
resignation, but should make every positive effort to decide his own fate. Or, to put it in
terms of the inevitability of a man’s individuality being conditioned by objective circumstances,
that he should not remain so passive a being as to be determined only by certain given
conditions, but should be one who is keenly conscious of his own responsibility in whatever steps he may take as a social being. Pechorin’s final conviction in the matter of fate could not save him, it is true; but what is shown in _A Fatalist_, as we have seen, is not Pechorin’s capability or his efforts to overcome his fate, but the need for an individual to strive passionately against his own fate, and a suggestion for the proper approach toward the solution of the problems involved therein.

_A Fatalist_ has yet another meaning. It is derived from the third incident described in that chapter. Pechorin’s action in this incident is not insignificant. On the contrary, it is, objectively speaking, the most significant of all the actions of Pechorin that are described in the novel. Pechorin in this incident goes into action in order to test his own fate. Apparently, he has no particular intention of making himself serviceable to others. Furthermore, he acts strictly within the limits of military service. But what is worth noting here is the fact that herein human love, as a factor that gives significance to an individual’s action, is treated, though in a rather peculiar manner, as something not exclusive but inclusive of _moments_ for its growth and transition into social universality. Symbolic in this sense are these words of Pechorin’s: “The officers congratulated me—as well they might.” This we take is the second meaning of the third incident in _A Fatalist_. Thus we believe that in the description of that third incident love is presented as something that renders an individual’s action meaningful, something from which issues a man’s meaningful action, or something that provides _moments_ for his action acquiring social serviceableness.